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ABSTRACT

The differential treatment of boys and girls interacting with teachers in day care settings was investigated in this study. Participants were 14 male and 14 female teachers and their 268 students (134 boys and 134 girls) in licensed day care centers located in an urban setting. The oldest toddler class of 2- through 3-year-olds, and a preschool class of 3- through 4-year-olds, of each teacher were observed twice over a 3-week interval. The Interactions for Sex Equity in Classroom Teaching (INTERSECT) Observation Form was used. It was found that teachers in day care classrooms most frequently employed praise when they gave feedback to children. The second most prevalent type of feedback was remediation. Acceptance and criticism were seldom employed. Boys engaged in more interactions with their teachers than did girls. Boys were criticized more often for misbehavior, and also received more remedial feedback for this problem. It was concluded that teachers in day care classrooms interact with boys and girls in different ways, and that the differential treatment of boys and girls exists in the type, amount, and distribution of interaction between teachers and children. (RH)

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SEX EQUITY/INEQUITY IN TEACHER-CHILD INTERACTION IN DAY CARE CLASSROOMS

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SEX EQUITY/INEQUITY IN TEACHER-CHILD
INTERACTION IN DAY CARE CLASSROOMS

ABSTRACT

This research investigated the existence and nature of the differential treatment of boys and girls in day care teacher-child classroom interaction using the INTERSECT Observation Form. The study sample consisted of 28 teachers--14 male and 14 female teachers in licensed day care centers located in an urban setting and their 268 students--134 boys and 134 girls. The oldest toddler class (2-3) years old and/or preschool class (3-4 years old) for each teacher was observed twice over a three week interval.

Teachers in day care classrooms most frequently employed praise when giving feedback to the children. The second most prevalent type of feedback given was remediation. Acceptance and criticism remarks were seldom employed by female and male teachers.

Boys engaged in more interactions with their teachers than the girls, were criticized more than the girls for misbehavior, and were remediated more than the girls for inappropriate behavior.

This study concluded that (1) teachers in day care classrooms interact with boys and girls differently and (2) the differential treatment of boys and girls exists in the type, amount, and distribution of interaction between teachers and children in day care classrooms.

SEX EQUITY/INEQUITY IN TEACHER-CHILD INTERACTION IN DAY CARE CLASSROOMS

Ongoing research involving observation and analysis of classroom interaction during the teaching process has focused on the manner in which teachers interact with their students. As a subset of that effort, researchers have focused on whether teachers are interacting equitably with their students. The differential treatment of male and female students has been a major concern because (1) the messages that teachers transmit to students through their interactions have an impact on the student's self-concept, behavior, learning, and achievement (Sadker & Sadker, 1980), and (2) variations within the classroom setting have an important impact on the student's emotional and social adjustment as well as on their academic progress (Hetherington & Parke, 1979). Consequently, educators have conducted research to anlayze the differences in the way teachers interact with male and female students in the classroom. Specifically, researchers have focused on how teachers respond to the replies, behavior, and academic performance of male and female students during their interactions within the classroom setting and whether these interactions are equitable.

Prior to this study, the differential treatment of male and female students has been investigated on the preschool level, the elementary level, the secondary level, and the postsecondary

level. A review of the literature indicates that teachers interact differently with female and male students in preschool, elementary, secondary, and postsecondary classrooms. Research conducted in preschool classrooms has documented the differential treatment of boys and girls with regard to the amount and kind of interaction and assistance the children receive from teachers (Serbin & O'Leary, 1975). On the elementary level, the differential treatment of boys and girls exists in the amount and kind of remediation and criticism comments given in response to the remarks and behavior of the girls and boys (Irvine, 1986; Simpson & Erickson, 1983). On the secondary level, research has documented differential treatment in the amount and kind of academic contact the boys and girls receive from teachers (Sadker & Sadker, 1986). Additionally, studies conducted in post-secondary classrooms has observed differential treatment in the teacher's responses to the comments of the male and female students (Hall & Sandler, 1982; Thomas, 1983). Thus, previous research has established that teachers on the preschool, elementary, secondary, and postsecondary levels interact with male and female students differently.

This research investigated whether the differential treatment of boys and girls exists in the interactions between

teachers and children in licensed day care centers located in an urban setting. This study was designed to examine the existence and the nature of the differential treatment of boys and girls in day care classrooms as reflected in teacher-child interaction. Specifically, this research investigated the type, amount, and distribution of interaction that takes place between a male or female teacher and male and female children. Further, this research was designed to compare and contrast the relationships between the interaction patterns of the children with male teachers to the interaction patterns of the children with female teachers in day care classrooms.

This investigation, exploratory in nature, utilized structured observation in order to collect the data. Trained observers recorded the types of interaction of male and female teachers with male and female children. The independent variables involved in the study were the sex of the teacher and the sex of the child. The two major dependent variables were: (1) teacher responses to intellectual content (praise comments, acceptance comments, remediation comments, and criticism comments) and (2) teacher responses to conduct content (praise comments, acceptance comments, remediation comments, and criticism comments). Other dependent variables that were

investigated were: ancillary teacher behaviors, tone-setting incidents, and entry, exit and transition behavior.

The sample population consisted of 28 teachers (14 male and 14 female) in licensed day care centers located in and urban setting and their 268 students (134 girls and 134 boys). The initial sample consisted of a pool of classrooms in day care centers whose director volunteered to participate in the study. From the pool of classrooms, 14 classrooms with at least one male teacher were selected. The teachers had various educational experiences. The classrooms contained 2-, 3-, or 4-year-old children of both sexes. Following the selection of the classrooms with male teachers, 14 classrooms with only female teachers were selected. The female teachers also had various educational experiences. The sample population of classrooms with female teachers also contained 2-, 3-, or 4-year-old children of both sexes. The fourteen classrooms with female teachers closely resembled the fourteen classrooms with male teachers that were initially selected.

The Observation Form called INTERSECT (Interactions for Sex Equity in Classroom Teaching), developed by the Network, Inc., 1981 was implemented to assess the type of interaction between a teacher and a child in day care classrooms. INTERSECT was

designed for observing and assessing sex equity or inequity in teacher-student interactions in Project INTERSECT'S elementary/ secondary classes (Sadker, Sadker, Bauchner, & Schmelzer, 1982). Carefully trained observers visited each classroom twice, with a 3-week interval, and employed the INTERSECT observation instrument. The observations lasted approximately 45 minutes: 5 minutes for seating arrangements, 30 minutes for interaction coding, and 10 minutes for tone-setting incidents. Analysis of the data included calculation of the frequency of the dependent variables and calculation of the coefficient of distribution for males and females. The data was also examined through the use of *t*-tests. A series of *t*-tests were conducted to investigate whether any significant differences exist between the interactions boys received from teachers and the interactions girls received from teachers in day care classrooms.

The researcher found that male and female teachers in day care classrooms responded to the replies, paper work, and behavior of the boys and girls differently. This research established that:

-The boys received more praise and acceptance for the intellectual nature of their replies than the girls from male and female teachers alike.

-The boys received more discipline, disapproval, and criticism than the girls from both female and male teachers.

-The boys were issued more reprimands than the girls for the same or similar misbehavior from male and female teachers.

-The girls were spoken to in a soft-spoken manner, and the boys were spoken to in a harsh tone of voice by female teachers only.

-The boys were given more direction and instruction in order to finish a task, while the girls were given assistance, wherein the teacher actually completed the tasks for them from male and female teachers alike.

-The girls were assigned to carry light-weight objects, while the boys were assigned to carry heavy objects.

Discussion

This research found that the differential treatment of boys and girls exists in day care classrooms. Through their differential interactions, teachers likely conveyed sexist attitudes to the children. The findings support the hypothesis that many teachers operate with preconceptions about the skills, behavior, and the performance of girls and boys based on their gender (Sadker & Sadker, 1982). During interactions with the teacher, the children received the messages that boys are independent, girls are dependent, girls play nicely, boys play

rough and girls are feminine and boys are masculine. Similarly, students in elementary classrooms receive the message that girls are helpful and sweet and the boys are aggressive and active (Brophy & Evertson, 1981).

The majority of the feedback given to boys and girls during classroom interactions consists of statements that convey positive reinforcement. Teachers in day care classrooms most frequently employ praise comments, indicating that the teachers do more than just accept the behavior, replies, and paper work of the children. In contrast to teachers studied at the elementary, secondary, and postsecondary levels, teachers in day care classrooms actually reward, reinforce, and encourage the productivity of girls and boys. They rarely criticize the remarks and paper work of the children. This finding suggests that teachers in day care classrooms attempt to promote good feelings and foster a positive self-concept in a child. The fact that they praise the replies and performance of the children more than simply accepting the comments and productivity of the children suggests that they take an active role in eliciting more positve responses and acceptable academic performance from the children. Hence, teachers in day care classrooms take a positive approach to learning; they give the girls and boys motivation and incentives

to behave and perform academic work correctly through the use of praise (Hetherington & Parke, 1979).

The current research revealed that boys in day care classrooms are given more guidance and instructions to help them finish their physical and oral activities, while girls are given actual assistance. That is, the teachers complete the girls' activities for them. Similarly, teachers in postsecondary, secondary, and elementary classrooms give male students extended directions on how to complete tasks independently and complete tasks for female students (Sadker & Sadker, 1980; Thomas, 1983). In essence, boys are encouraged to finish tasks on their own. Boys are helped to learn through the use of clues, hints, and directions. Thus, boys are given direction in problem-solving behavior. This suggests that boys are encouraged to gain mastery of the skills involved in a task. Teachers give girls the message that they are dependent and boys are autonomous. Girls are being taught to rely on the teacher to finish their task. Thus, girls receive the message that girls are inferior to boys (Sadker & Sadker, 1980). This behavior continues throughout elementary, secondary, and postsecondary classrooms (Sadker & Sadker, 1980; Thomas, 1983).

In the area of sex segregation, teachers in day care class-

rooms do not assign seats to boys and girls. In contrast to studies at the elementary and secondary school levels, an observation of day care classrooms shows very little segregation by sex. This would appear to stem from two main causes: first, teachers do not assign seats to give the children an opportunity to explore the environment. The teachers believe that freedom of movement within the classroom generates self-expression and better academic performance. Second, teachers do not assign seats, because the types of activities (coloring, painting, listening to stories, singing songs, etc.) do not warrant assigned seating.

In contrast to the lack of physical separation of the sexes, teachers in day care classrooms display gender differences in task assignment. Matching of girls and boys with tasks reflects sex role stereotyping. Correspondingly, teachers studied in elementary and secondary classrooms assign children tasks on the basis of their sex (Sadker & Sadker, 1980). Teachers act as if there are certain tasks designed for boys and certain tasks designed for girls. This result implies that teachers have a set of preconceived perceptions related to the skills and strength of girls and boys.

The significance of this research was to provide information about sex equity in day care classrooms. This study was conducted

to obtain an understanding of the types of interaction that take place between a teacher and a child in day care classrooms and how these interaction patterns maximize or hinder learning through the provision or impediment of sex equity in the day care classroom setting. Also, this research endeavored to add information to the existing body of knowledge in the area of sex equity in classroom teaching, teacher-child interaction, and teacher behavior.

Further, the investigation into teacher-child interaction patterns in day care classrooms attempted to provide information that can be used in the education and training of day care personnel. Moreover, this study was conducted to alert teachers in day care settings to potential differences in their teaching patterns and behavior.

Conclusions

The differential treatment of boys and girls exists in the interactions between teachers and children in day care classrooms. Teachers convey sex differences in their comments which are designed to reinforce or remediate behavior. They respond to the replies, paper work, and actions of the boys and girls differently. As a result, male and female teachers transmit sexist messages to the girls and boys through their teaching styles and behavior.

INTERACTIONS IN DAY CARE CLASSROOMS

The differential treatment of boys and girls is prevalent in the type, amount, and distribution of interaction taking place in day care classrooms. Boys and girls receive different types of feedback from teachers in day care classrooms. Male and female teachers alike issue more remediation and criticism comments in response to the intellectual nature of a boy's reply or paper work, his behavior, and the physical appearance of his paper work than to those of girls. The boys also receive more praise and acceptance comments for the intellectual nature of their paper work than do the girls. The boys receive more feedback and academic contact from teachers than do girls. Overall, the boys receive more positive and more negative interactions than do the girls. Also, the boys receive more interactions based on their representation in the classroom from the teachers. The girls consistently receive less feedback, less academic contact and less interactions based on their representation in the classroom.

Teachers in day care classrooms display differential treatment of boys and girls during active teaching attention. During classroom teaching sessions male and female teachers alike communicate verbally with girls and boys differently. The boys receive more directions, guidance and asistance to help them finish a task than do the girls. The girls are given actual

physical assistance in that the teachers complete the activity for them.

Moreover, the differential treatment of boys and girls is evident in the classroom management skills employed by teachers in day care classrooms. Teachers discipline the boys and girls differently. They give the girls lighter punishments than the boys. Teachers also speak to the girls and boys in different tones of voice when reprimanding them. Teachers speak to the boys in a harsh tone of voice and speak to the girls in a soft-spoken manner.

Further, teachers in day care classrooms display differential treatment when assigning tasks to the boys and girls. Teachers issue boys and girls different kinds of tasks. The boys are assigned to carry heavy objects, and the girls are assigned to carry light-weight objects. Teachers have definitive tasks for the boys and definitive tasks for the girls based on their preconceived perceptions related to the skills and strength of boys and girls. The matching of girls and boys with tasks reflects sex role stereotyping in day care classrooms.

Also, teachers in day care classrooms exhibit differences through their teaching patterns as do teachers in preschool, elementary, secondary, and postsecondary classrooms. Teachers in

day care classrooms transmit sexist messages during their interactions with children in ways similar to those exhibited by teachers in previous research studies. Studies of the interaction patterns of teachers and students at all levels indicate that: (1) males receive more feedback and academic contact than females, (2) females receive fewer positive and fewer negative remarks than males, and (3) males receive more directions and instructions to complete a task than girls. In consequence, teachers in day care classrooms display differential treatment of boys and girls in ways similar to teachers in preschool, elementary, secondary, and postsecondary classrooms.

Analysis of the data indicates that teachers in day care classrooms could benefit from awareness of sex differences in their interactions with the girls and boys. Informing teachers of the messages that they communicate to the children during classroom interaction could reduce the teacher expectations related to the skills, behavior, and academic performance of girls and boys. When teachers in day care classrooms recognize that they interact with girls and boys differently, they can make positive changes in their classroom interactions as well as their attitude and expectations (Sadker & Sadker, 1985). Training teachers in day care classrooms to employ sex equity skills in

classroom interaction would help them to implement interaction patterns, teaching techniques, and disciplinary methods which foster the atainment of sex equity. Moreover, helping teachers to reduce communicating sex differencees to children would increase their ability to encourage learning and academic performance. Additionally, helping teachers in day care classrooms to interact with boys and girls equally would help to reduce children's sex role stereotypes in behavior, free play time, and in activities (Sadker & Sadker, 1980).

Future replication studies should examine the effects of sex equity training on the teacher-student interaction patterns in day care classrooms. A sex equity awareness workshop would be employed to enlighten teachers as to the existence of the differential treatment of boys and girls during their interactions with the children. A control group and an experimental group would be organized. The teachers in the experimental group would participate in the workshop. They would review the salient research in the area of the differential treatment of males and females in teacher-student classroom interaction, films and videotapes that demonstrated equitable and differential treatment, and would engage in role playing exercises. Additionally, the teachers in the experimental group would practice implementing

the skills and demonstrate the ability to distribute equitable interactions. Afterwhich, the teachers in the experimental group would implement the sex equity skills during their classroom interactions with the boys and girls. Trained raters would code the interactions of the control group and the experimental group. The data would be examined to measure the effects of sex equity training on the distribution of sex equitable interactions in day care classrooms.

This research also has implications for training. A course in sex equity skills should be included in early childhood programs for teachers and teacher aides. The curriculum would point out the importance of sex equity in classroom interaction, develop management skills, teaching styles, teaching behaviors, and interaction patterns which foster the attainment of sex equity. Such a course would prepare individuals to facilitate learning by interacting with the students in an equitable manner.

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